

VZCZCXRO0132
OO RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9236
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS KINSHASA 000173

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)
SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - FEBRUARY 23

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

Security Situation in North Kivu

¶2. (SBU) MONUC reported clashes between FDLR and FARDC forces in Kashabere, Maisisi and north of Pinga, Walikale on February 23. Additional clashes were reported in Blukwe, Lubero on February 21. Prior to the joint FARDC-RDF operation against them, FDLR forces had not occupied the Blukwe area. FDLR have subsequently been pushed east into the area near Lake Edward from locations west of the Kanyabayonga-Lubero road axis.

¶3. (SBU) According to MONUC, an unidentified armed group attacked the compound of the NGO Concern in Matanda, Masisi on February 22. The attackers allegedly demanded the turn over of foreign staff. No foreign staff members were in the compound and the group subsequently raided the Catholic Church compound in Matanda, which frequently houses visiting humanitarian personnel. The group fired indiscriminately before departing the compound. According to the UN, no one was killed or wounded in the attack. As a result, the UN is considering the expansion of the current Bihambwe-Masisi escort-required corridor further east to encompass the entire Sake-Masisi axis.

¶4. (SBU) The USAID DART team received reports that following the February 17 attack by unidentified armed men on a three-car IRC convoy on the Kichanga-Mweso road (Rutshuru-Masisi border), IRC staff visited the MONUC base at Kichanga to advocate for enhanced MONUC patrols to protect humanitarian access. MONUC has decreased the number of personnel at the Kichanga base from 500 to 35 soldiers recently in order to enhance its presence in Pinga, Walikale. As a result, MONUC indicated it has inadequate resources to enhance patrols at this time.

Humanitarian Situation in North Kivu

¶5. (SBU) In the first seven weeks of 2009, WHO reported 537 new cases of cholera and five deaths in North Kivu. New cases continue to decline, with 55 new cases reported during the week commencing February 15, as opposed to 119 new cases during the commencing January 4. UNICEF noted cholera epidemics in the Goma, Karisimbi, Mweso, and Kirotshe health zones as of February 18.

¶6. (SBU) On February 20, OCHA reported the commencement of a joint WFP-FAO project with local NGO cooperation to distribute seeds and tools to a targeted 2,400 returning IDP households along the Tongo-Kabizo axis in Rutshuru.

¶7. (SBU) On February 18, UNICEF noted the completion of non-food item kit distributions to 3,600 displaced and returnee households in

the Nyakakoma-Ishasha area and 3,492 returnee and 1,736 displaced households in the Kabizo-Rutshuru area, as part of the USAID-funded UNICEF Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM).

Nairobi Talks

18. (U) A February 23 press report notes the signing of a preliminary agreement outlining terms of reference between the GDRC and CNDP delegations in Goma. The five days of talks in Goma will be followed by additional meetings later this week in Nairobi.

Security Situation in Orientale Province

19. (SBU) According to a MONUC source in Orientale, a protection response team will soon deploy to Dungu, with representatives from the Political, Child Support, DRRR, and Civil Affairs units. UNHCR and UNICEF are already present in Dungu. The final destination of the team has not been determined. Similar units have been deployed into areas of North Kivu that MONUC assessment has identified as under elevated risk of FDLR reprisal attacks.

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